

The Legacy of Kim Jong II

Difficulty:

DIFFICULT

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Discussion activities to be done after completing this EA lesson

Today's report was about North Korea and its situation following the death of its ruler Kim Jong II. What picture of Mr Kim does it give? What is the description of the country during his time as leader? What is known about his possible successor?

Extension discussion topics

A. Talking about and going over the specific topic / idea / issue in listening text

Introduction = North Korea and its political and economic situation. Kim Jong II and other members of the dynasty.

1. What do we learn in the report about the recent past in North Korea?
 - since it was founded, has been ruled by father (Kim II Sun) and then son (Kim Jong II).
 - both have favored military government, and developed the nation's army at the expense of other things (fifth largest army in the world).
 - the style of government has favored the cult of the personality of the leader(s).
 - the outside world sees North Korea's as a brutal regime, with hundreds of thousands of people languishing in gulags (Soviet-style concentration camps).
 - the North Korean military has launched its own satellites, developed and tested missiles and nuclear weapons.
 - this has caused deep international concern and the political isolation of North Korea. (China, Japan, Russia, South Korea and the US have all tried to persuade Pyongyang to curtail its nuclear program)
 - in the period up to the mid-1990s, a series of natural disasters hit the country, and a terrible famine caused the deaths of up to two million people.
 - North Korea refused large amounts of humanitarian assistance, yet people starved.
 - the country's infrastructure has been described as a disaster (e.g., electricity system, agriculture).
2. Who is Bruce Klingner, and why did he describe North Korea's economy as "defunct"? When?
 - senior research fellow for northeast Asia for the Heritage Foundation (Washington D.C.).
 - the country's scant resources were used to develop and maintain the army.
 - the natural disasters (very cold weather / snow / floods - only mentioned in the glossary) weakened the economy.

- after the collapse of the Soviet Union, North Korea stopped receiving the large subsidies it was getting before (as a communist nation).
 - the communist regime itself was inefficient.
 - because the country refused to reform its economic and political style, it was unable to receive assistance from willing donor nations.
3. Reliable information about members of the Kim dynasty is scarce. But what details does the report give of the three members it mentions?
- Kim Il Sun: founding ruler, died in 1994.
 - Kim Jong Il: born in 1942, graduated from university in 1964 and joined Korean Workers' Party. Strengthened his ruling father's image over three decades. Once in power (1994>), was known as "Dear Leader", prodigious general and tireless friend of the people in N. Korea. Rarely appeared in public, and his voice was seldom broadcast. His picture / image was familiar around the world: short and rotund, with platform shoes and a bouffant hairstyle.
 - Kim Jong Un: now in his mid-20s, Kim Jong Il's youngest son, attended school in Switzerland, has been seen as a potential successor to his father since 2009.

Can you add any more details about North Korea or about any of the three men? See also: <http://www.voanews.com/english/news/asia/After-Kims-Death-More-Questions-Than-Answers-135921658.html>

B. Expanding on (one of) the topics / ideas / issues in listening text

Topic = Dynasties and hereditary succession.

1. A dynasty can be described as "a sequence of rulers considered members of the same family". <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dynasty> The report gave an insight into the Kim family dynasty in North Korea. What other political / royal / imperial dynasties do you know of? What details can you remember about their members?
2. Do you agree with the idea that a powerful family dynasty should rule an area or nation? Why / why not? Can you see benefits to this type of rule? What disadvantages could you list?
3. Have you ever seen any episodes of, or heard about the popular American TV series "Dynasty" from the 1980s and shown on various TV channels since then. If so, can you explain how the family in the series fits the description of a dynasty?

OR, Topic = A colorful figure from a family dynasty.

Find out all you can about one member of a family dynasty that interests you. Be prepared to tell you teacher or group about the person, and also their position and importance in the dynasty.

The wikipedia address above gives a vast number of links to dynasties around the world at various stages in history.

C. Extending discussion of (one of) the topics / ideas / issues in listening text

Topic = Dictatorships.

1. Besides being an example of a dynasty, North Korea's political regime is also a dictatorship; "an autocratic form of absolute rule by leadership unrestricted by law, constitutions, or other social and political factors within the state."
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dictatorship#Individual_cases
Can you explain this definition using your own words?
2. Much of the outside world saw Kim Jong Il as a ruthless dictator who allowed his people to starve, just as his father had done. Do you think all dictators are automatically ruthless, or become ruthless? If so, why? (Fear of political opponents, absence of need to take into account views of others; Other reasons?) Can you give examples of ruthless dictators in history? What do you know about their life and deeds?
3. What do you think of the argument that the "concentration of power (in one person) can be legitimate, depending on the circumstances, objectives and methods employed."
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dictatorship#Individual_cases
If you agree with this statement, can you think of situations where this method of rule might be a benefit?
4. In Europe in the eighteenth century there was a group of rulers known as the "enlightened despots" - in other words, they could be described as "benevolent dictators". They generally tolerated different religions, allowed freedom of speech and press, let people own property, and encouraged arts, science and education. Have you heard of the term "enlightened despots" before? Do you know any more about these rulers? Did any of them change and become ruthless? Can you think of anyone you might call a "benevolent dictator" in recent history? Explain why.

Audioscript

North Korean leader Kim Jong Il ordered his military to develop and launch missiles. His forces worked to put satellites into orbit, and they developed and tested nuclear weapons.

The reclusive and erratic leader's weapons programs deeply worried his neighbors and Washington. China, Japan, Russia and South Korea joined the United States in holding talks with North Korea aimed at curtailing Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions. Despite some progress, North Korea continued testing weapons.

Kim Jong Il took power in 1994 upon the death of his father, North Korea's founding ruler, Kim Il Sun. Reliable biographical information about Mr Kim is scarce. He rarely appeared in public, and his voice was seldom broadcast. His image around the world was familiar: short and rotund, with platform shoes and a bouffant hairstyle, perhaps to make him look taller. He also reportedly loved western films, with a video collection said to contain up to twenty thousand tapes and DVDs.

Like his father, Kim Jong Il had a "military first" approach to government, devoting much of the country's scant resources to its vast army, the world's fifth largest.

Kim Jong Il was born in February of 1942. He graduated from university in 1964 and joined the Korean Workers' Party. Over the next three decades, the younger Kim dedicated his life to strengthening his father's image. But North Korea's economy faltered after some natural disasters and the collapse of the Soviet Union and its subsidies. An ensuing famine reportedly killed up to two million people in North Korea in the mid-1990s.

Bruce Klingner is senior research fellow for northeast Asia for the Heritage Foundation.

"He inherited a... not only a brutal regime, but a defunct economy. Once the Soviet Union collapsed, and North Korea was no longer getting large subsidies, the economy really went... it got even worse. You had a social, or communist system where it was inefficient. The, you know, the electricity didn't work, the agricultural system was a disaster, everything really was a disaster."

But Klingner says it didn't have to be that way, had Mr Kim not isolated North Korea from the rest of the world.

"South Korea, the US and other countries were willing to provide large amounts of not only humanitarian assistance, and at one point, North Korea was the largest recipient of US aid in all of Asia. But also, had they been willing to make some economic and political reform, they could have gained a lot of developmental assistance. But that couldn't happen under that kind of regime."

North Korean media called him "Dear Leader", portraying him as a prodigious general and tireless friend of the people. But abroad, many perceived him as a ruthless dictator who built up North Korea's atomic weapons program, while allowing his people to starve.

"His legacy will be of a impoverished nation* where a million or more of its citizens died of starvation and starvation-related diseases in the mid-nineties, 'cause North Korea was reluctant to allow aid to come into his country. His legacy will be of a brutal regime that used gulags. Hundreds of thousands of people languished in concentration camps in his country."

Kim Jong Il is believed to have had three sons by two women and a daughter by a third. By mid-2009, reports emerged speculating that Mr Kim's youngest son, Kim Jong Un, would be his successor.

Kim Jong Un, now in his mid-twenties, is widely reported to have attended school in Switzerland, but little else is known about the man who might continue North Korea's family dynasty.

Robert Raffaele, VOA News.

* The speaker should say: "**an impoverished nation**".